The preamble to the Constitution

"We the people of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution of the United States of America."

The United States Constitution is a program of Government at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. The Consortium works with schools, governments, and community organizations to prepare North Carolina's young people to be active, responsible citizens. For more information, visit our website at www.civics.org

why do we have a United States Constitution?

On July 4, 1776, the United States declared its independence from Great Britain; in 1783, the United States won the Revolutionary War and became its own nation.

fearing the Articles of Confederation were too weak to serve the great United States, state representatives met in 1786 and concluded an entirely new constitution was needed. Over the next couple of months, Congress met and wrote the United States Constitution. It was signed on September 17, 1787, adopted by the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia, ratified by 3/4 of our 13 states in 1789, and took effect in 1790.

Now over 200 years old, the United States Constitution is the oldest federal constitution in use. described both the structure of the federal government and the rights of the people, the United States Constitution has stood the test of time and has undergone only 27 changes or additions.
Section 10
The states are unable to perform the following acts:
- Enter into any treaty or alliance
- Approve private military action
- Coin money
- Give out bills of credit
- Pass any bill of attainted or ex post facto law
- Grant titles of nobility
- Tax imports or exports except for small inspection fees, without the approval of Congress
- Keep troops or ships of war in peacetime without the approval of Congress
- Make treaties without the approval of Congress
- Make war without the approval of Congress, unless invaded

Article IV: Amending the US Constitution
- Amendments to the Constitution may be proposed when 2/3 of both the House and the Senate deem it necessary.
- Amendments to the Constitution may be proposed when 2/3 of all state legislatures ask Congress to call a convention to do so.
- Amendments to the Constitution must be ratified by legislatures in 3/4 of the states or by conventions in 3/4 of the states.

Article V: The US Constitution is the Law of the Land
- The US Constitution is the fundamental law of the land.
- The Constitution, federal laws, and treaties are the law of the land, and the judges in every state are bound to these laws.
- Federal and State officials must comply with the Constitution.
- No religious test shall ever be required to hold a public office.

Article VI: Ratifying the Constitution
Nine of the 13 states had to ratify the US Constitution before it was established:
- Delaware, December 7, 1787
- Pennsylvania, December 12, 1787
- New Jersey, December 18, 1787
- Georgia, January 2, 1788
- Connecticut, January 9, 1788
- Massachusetts, February 6, 1788
- Maryland, April 28, 1788
- South Carolina, May 23, 1788
- New Hampshire, June 21, 1788
- Virginia, June 25, 1788
- New York, July 26, 1788
- North Carolina, November 21, 1789
- Rhode Island, May 29, 1790

The Bill of Rights
The Bill of Rights is the first ten amendments to the Constitution, all of which were ratified in 1791 to guarantee the following Constitutional rights:
- First Amendment: Establish a free press and practice religion, to speak your thoughts freely, to assemble peacefully, and to petition the government.
- Second Amendment: To keep and bear arms in certain situations.
- Third Amendment: To refuse to let soldiers stay in your house unless required by law.
- Fourth Amendment: To be secure against unreasonable searches and seizures.
- Fifth Amendment: To be prosecuted for a capital or infamous crime only when indicted by a Grand Jury; to not be tried for the same crime twice; to not be incriminated against yourself; to not have the government restrain your "life, liberty, or property without due process of law;" and to not have the government take your personal property for public use without compensation.
- Sixth Amendment: If charged with a crime, you have the right to have a speedy and public trial, "to have an impartial jury" from the state where the crime was committed, to know the charges against you, to confront the witnesses speaking against you, to compel a witness to speak on your behalf, and to have an attorney represent you.
- Seventh Amendment: To have a trial by jury in most civil cases.
- Eighth Amendment: To not have excessive bail, excessive fines, or cruel and unusual punishment imposed.
- Ninth Amendment: To know you have other rights in addition to those identified in the Constitution.
- Tenth Amendment: To have the powers not delegated to the federal government by the Constitution

Other Amendments:
- Eleventh Amendment: States cannot sue other states in federal court.
- Twelfth Amendment: Members of the Electoral College cast separate ballots for president and vice president.
- Thirteenth Amendment: Slavery is abolished; Congress has the right to enforce abolition.
- Fourteenth Amendment: Provides due process and equal protection under the law to citizens, who are all persons "born or naturalized in the US."
- Fifteenth Amendment: Prohibits the federal and state governments from denying individuals the right to vote based on race, color, or prior servitude.
- Sixteenth Amendment: Creates the income tax.
- Seventeenth Amendment: Establishes the direct election of senators.
- Eighteenth Amendment: Bans alcohol; Prohibition begins.
- Nineteenth Amendment: Gives women the right to vote.
- Twentieth Amendment: Changes conditions of presidential and congressional terms and of presidential succession.
- Twenty-First Amendment: Prohibition is repealed.
- Twenty-Second Amendment: The President cannot serve more than two terms.
- Twenty-Third Amendment: Gives presidential electors to the District of Columbia.
- Twenty-Fourth Amendment: Prohibits the federal and state governments from requiring payment of a poll tax as a quid pro quo for voting.
- Twenty-Fifth Amendment: Changes conditions of presidential succession, allows temporary removal of a president, and allows the replacement of a vice president.
- Twenty-Sixth Amendment: Grants citizens 18 years and older the right to vote.
- Twenty-Seventh Amendment: Limits congressional pay raises.